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ABSTRACT

The New York State Board of Regents has produced a Latin syllabus, based on current second language acquisition research, that stresses functional communication skills rather than traditional linguistic elements. The focus of the syllabus is direct communication from the ancient to the modern world through reading skills, supported by writing and, to a lesser extent, by listening and speaking skills. The syllabus incorporates development in logical and productive thinking and cultural awareness. The concept of communication as interaction on a particular topic, in a specific situation, for a definite purpose or function is the foundation of the syllabus. The elements of topic, situation, function, and proficiency level are identified for elaboration in the process of curriculum development. The syllabus insists on a continuity in the development of both language and cultural skills from Latin to English, and it provides proficiency guidelines for several levels. The syllabus encourages individualized program structures suited to districts of differing size and needs, not by prescribing specific methodology or instructional materials but by defining the elements of thoughtful curriculum development for creative teachers to undertake. (MSE)

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# LATIN FOR COMMUNICATION: NEW YORK STATE SYLLABUS

(A paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Philological Association, ACL session, December 29, 1985, Washington, D.C.)

by Richard C. Gascoyne

There is an excitement in the air with regard to all foreign language teaching in the nation and an urgency, that New York State has translated into guidelines which already have increased enrollments in the foreign language classes of the state. The New York State Board of Regents, governing body of education in the state, has mandated that each public school district must make available instruction in a language other than English and that all public school students must complete two years of study of a second language by the end of grade 9, thus requiring second language instruction for all students and early second language instruction, normally beginning in the late elementary or middle grades or junior high school. Those students who have entered ninth grade this September and who wish to obtain a New York State Regents high school diploma must have completed three units of credit in a foreign language and pass a state Regents examination in that language in order to graduate in the class of 1989.[1]

Latin enrollments have been increasing steadily in New York State since 1977 to reach more than 18,000 in 1984 in the public schools of the state. We are hearing encouraging news all over the state of programs in Latin for all students, as early as the seventh grade, the sixth grade, and even the fifth grade. Marion Polsky, who has had great success with elementary school children in New York City, is working on materials geared to students in grades 4 - 6. Principals and superintendents, concerned about implementing the mandates, are asking what to do and how to do it. I shudder when they ask, "Are there qualified teachers available to begin such a Latin program?"

To provide guidance in carrying out the New York State mandate, the State

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Education Department has produced two new syllabi, titled Modern Languages for Communication and Latin for Communication.[2] The new syllabi, based on current research on second language acquisition, provide an outline for curriculum development that proposes a shift in second language instruction from an approach that stresses the linguistic aspects of language to one that stresses the skills of functional communication.

The goals of teaching and learning Latin have remained constant for many years in the Latin classrooms of the nation. They continue to be essentially the same in the current syllabus. The methods of achieving these goals have changed; the nature of Latin students has changed; the resources available to Latin teachers have changed. The focus of the concept of Latin for Communication is on direct communication from the ancient to the modern world through reading Latin. The primary goal of Latin for communication is the development of skills in reading Latin, supported by the skills of listening, speaking, and writing. Flowing naturally from reading Latin, and integrally connected to it is the development of language skills which in the syllabus have been subdivided into vocabulary, grammar, derivation, and word study. The pursuit of this goal will develop Latin language skills, English language skills, and abstract skills of language which can facilitate subsequent language learning. A third goal which again flows naturally from reading Latin, whether it be authentic material, adapted sources, or Latin composed for beginners is cultural awareness, subdivided here into categories of literature, public life, myths and legends, daily life, art and architecture, and history. In addition to these three basic goals specfic to the teaching and learning of Latin, the Regents Action Plan has identified certain generic sub-goals that should be developed in all students in all classes. The Regents goals state that

> Each student will master communication skills in order to:
> think logically and creatively;
> apply reasoning skills to issues and problems;
> determine what information is needed for particular purposes and be able to acquire, organize, and use that information for those

purposes
Each student will respect . . . values and acquire skills, knowledge, understanding, and attitudes . . .
Each student will develop a commitment to life-long learning with capacity for undertaking new studies, synthesizing new knowledge and experience with the known, and refining the ability to judge.[3]

Perhaps much of that sounds like educational jargon from the corridors of a State Education Department, but today's analysis in the Latin classroom of an imperfect subjunctive in a present contrary to fact condition can indeed sharpen the skills of thinking, and the skills of organizing, applying, and synthesizing bits of knowledge. I think that it has not been in style for Latin teachers to make these generalized claims for their discipline, but here they are, mandated goals for all classrooms in New York State. Everything comes back in style if you wait long enough.

The goals of the new syllabus are no newer than those put forth in the report of the Classical Investigation in 1924, goals which never fully hit the textbooks or the classroom as they were intended. The document Latin for Communication redirects the focus to reading and contrasts the old and the new as follows:

> Latin vocabulary and Latin grammar have often dictated the activities of the classroom and have often determined the focus of the textbook. They are important elements and necessary tools in the achievement of goals. The message of the current syllabus is that communication in Latin should dictate the activities of the classroom and should provide the focus of the text and that communication should be the medium of achieving the goals . . . The focus of communication . . . whether it be text, art object, or an inscription on a building, . . . will be on the ancient world through a direct line of communication. From this focus, necessities such as grammar and vocabulary evolve naturally.[4]

What is communication? The syllabus is based on the assumption that communication is interaction on a particular topic, in a specific situation, for some definite purpose or function. When these three elements are combined communication takes place. How well that communication takes place is the level of proficiency. The syllabus pulls apart these elements and analyzes them in detail. The analysis culminates in lists and charts which state learning

outcomes at three checkpoints in the foreign language program. The syllabus provides a destination, the learning outcomes, but not a road map to the checkpoints. That road map is individual curriculum development, which is beginning to spring up all over the state, on a local basis and through such professional organizations as CAES, the Classical Association of the Empire State.

The syllabus attempts to identify the elements of communication in learning Latin--the elements of topics, situations, functions, and proficiencies. Each element is broken down into its component parts and long lists are part of the scientific analysis. By identifying, defining, analyzing communiation in Latin, the first step in curriculum development is accomplished. The second step is putting the elements together into a harmonious unit, an individualized program, in which the textbook plays an important role. The third step is the art of presentation by the creative teacher. The process starts with scientific analysis and ends with artistic synthesis.

One component of the scientific analysis which has caused concern among some New York State teachers is the mention of proficiencies in speaking. The emphasis in the syllabus is on reading. It is true that listening, speaking, and writing are addressed as auxiliary skills. Latin for Communication, unlike its companion document, Modern Languages for Communication, does not emphasize listening-speaking skills. Conversational Latin is not a basic goal, but the sound of Latin as a vehicle of communication should be a part of the classroom.

The syllabus insists on a continuity or flow in the development of skills from Latin into English, skills which the syllabus has separated into language and culture, each with their distinct proficiencies at three checkpoints: A, B, and C.

One purpose of the syllabus is to encourage individualized program structures

suited to school districts of different sizes and different needs. In many, if not most, schools in New York State the traditional Level I of a foreign language will be spread over two to four years of instruction before entrance into high school. The syllabus describes the end of that instruction as Checkpoint A, two full years of study for which a statewide Proficiency Examination is being constructed. This test is the mechanism by which one unit of high school credit can be granted to a student before that student enters high school. Checkpoint B implies two more years of high school study, the traditional Latin II and III. This is the point where the New York State Regents Examination in Latin is administered, an examination which for 120 years has been a part of one of the most sophisticated testing systems in the nation. Checkpoint C is the scope of the traditional Latin IV and V. Either Advanced Placement Latin Examinations would be appropriate at that level.

In highlighting the communicative act of reading and development of general language skills, the syllabus does not ignore grammar, morphology, and syntax. A three-page list of grammatical topics assigns items to the various checkpoints. But, these are not items to be mastered for their own sake. Rather, they serve three purposes: 1) as functional aids to reading, 2) as vehicles for recognizing general patterns of linguistic structure, and 3) as a means of acquiring new facilities in understanding and manipulating English.

Foreign language educators are insisting more and more that the material used in second language instruction be "authentic" -- a menu, a time table, a magazine, newspaper, billboard, roadsign, loudspeaker announcement. The concern for authenticity is shared by the Latin syllabus. Reading is the central activity of the new Latin classroom, and when reading real Latin literature in the original students are communicating in the most direct way possible with the ancient world. At the beginning levels, the Latin readings will be made-up or synthetic, composed for the acquisition of content and language skills. The syllabus recommends that these readings consist of connected passages of

culturally relevant materials to which beginning students can relate personally. It further recommends that other kinds of truly authentic materials be introduced even at the beginning stages of Latin study. These might include, for example, inscriptions, graffiti, light verse, and curse tablets. Such materials are most usefully presented as a supplement to textbook material and may relate to both the grammatical and the cultural elements in a given textbook

David Perry has authored the first in a series of Latin teaching handbooks based on the syllabus.[5] It deals with literature and suggests what authors can be read to accomplish the prescribed learning outcomes at the three checkpoints.. He has defined literature somewhat more broadly than the traditional definition, but all of what he suggests is authentic material.

What does all of this mean for the classroom, for instruction, methods, and selection of materials? The syllabus does not prescribe any one method or point to any one set of instructional material. It does prescribe thoughtful curriculum development to weave the separate elements of communication into a useful fabric and favors eclecticism in insisting that no one methodology will assure achievement of the objectives. In the hands of a creative teacher any of the currently available Latin textbooks would be adaptable to teaching Latin for communication. It is the orientation and focus of the instruction that are important, and the creative enthusiasm of a good teacher.

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[1] Briefly summarized, the New York State Regents mandates in second language are the following:

1. Students in the graduating class of 1989 must have completed 3 units of high school credit in a second language and pass a Regents examination in that language in order to receive a New York State Regents diploma.
2. Public school students in the graduating class of 1992 must have one unit of study in a second language at some time during grades K-9 (for a Regents or a local diploma).
3. Puclic school students in the graduating class of 1994 must have two units of study in a second language at some time during grades K-9 (for a Regents or a local diploma).

[2] Latin for Communication: New York State Syllabus. Draft. 1985. The University of the State of New York, The State Education Department, Albany, NY. 12234. The publication is currently in a state of field review by Latin teachers in the public schools of New York State. The syllabuswillbe published in August 1986.

[3] Latin for Communication, p. 8.

[4] Latin for Communication, p. 12-13.

[5] David J. Perry, CAES Latin Teaching Handbooks: Literature. Classical Association of the Empire State, 1985.

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